

Pascal's Wager

Pastor Joseph Clark – May 12, 2020

“We know the truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart.”

– Blaise Pascal

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

– Jesus Christ, John, Chapter 14, verse 6.

Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician, physicist, inventor, and writer, who lived in France between the years 1623 and 1662. He is legendary amongst mathematicians, inventors, philosopher's, and scientists. His accomplishments, essays, and theories are taught in Universities globally today and applied by scientists and mathematicians worldwide. He made numerous contributions in multiple fields. He is known for Pascal's triangle, mathematical theorems, essays on his experiments related to barometric pressure, and hydrostatic pressure, and his probability theory. He also invented an early digital calculator.

Pascal is also famous for “Pascal's Wager.” A detailed and scientifically valid theorem that argues the logical justification for belief in God. Basically, Pascal's theory states that there is nothing but upside to believing in God, and nothing but downside to choosing not to believe in God. Pascal's Wager is as scientifically and mathematically complete as any published theorem. It concludes that if we wager that God exists and choose faith, and if God does exist, not only will we live a more rewarding life, but we will enjoy eternal salvation. If we choose not to believe in God and he does in fact exist, we live a lesser life containing much more suffering and we face eternal misery. Whereas, if we choose to believe in God and he does not exist, we still live a fuller more rewarding life, and we will not be the wiser in death, and if we choose not to believe in God and he doesn't exist, we will live a lesser life and we will not be the wiser in death.

Wager: Receive God	Life on Earth	Eternity
If God exists	Fuller life - faith	Salvation
If God does not exist	Fuller life - faith	We will not be the wiser in death

Wager: Reject God	Life on Earth	Eternity
If God exists	Lesser life - faithless	Misery
If God does not exist	Lesser life - faithless	We will not be the wiser

Therefore, we have everything to gain by believing in God and everything to lose by not believing in God. Choosing to receive God is a no risk proposition. Rejecting God is a high-risk proposition. A dear friend of mine used to be a smoker. Once, when he stepped out of his office for a cigarette, his boss who was a non-smoker, walked by and said to him. “Weak or stupid. Which is it?” Pascal’s Wager suggests that to choose faith in God is as wise as choosing to quit a life-threatening habit.

Reflection: Blaise Pascal is a legendary mathematician, inventor and philosopher. A brilliant, logical, and rationale man like Blaise Pascal believes in God and chose to be a Christian. How does this make me feel about what I believe? What do I believe?

One Saturday I was at a birthday party for my girlfriend’s uncle. When I first entered the party, I saw an adult gentleman about 30 years of age whose features and behavior indicated that he had Down’s Syndrome. I thought to myself, I will pray with that young man tonight. The crowd was thick, so I went to the buffet and then ate dinner with my girlfriend and some of her relatives. After dinner, I saw the young man making his way towards me with urgency from across the room. Now it is important to point out that I was dressed in jeans and a hoodie. My dress did not stand-out in any way. The young man arrived at my table with his older sister a few steps behind. He said to me.

“Would you please pray with me?”

I answered that it would be my privilege. I took one of his hands in mine, I placed my other hand on his shoulder, we both bowed our heads and I said a prayer. When I was finished, he said thank you. I shook his hand and told him that he was welcome, and I thanked him back. As he walked away his sister asked me. “Are you a minister?”

“Yes” I answered. Then I asked. “Did your brother know that when he came over and asked me to pray?”

“No”, she answered, “but he can always sense a minister, and he asks them to pray with him.”

I believe that the Holy Spirit provides this young man with discernment. He has the faith of a child. A complete knowing in God that contains no adult pessimism. No doubt. No intellectual haughtiness. He simply knows that he is a child of God.

Our almighty and merciful Father knows our hearts. The all-powerful Holy Spirit works within us if we choose to give ourselves to Jesus Christ and live in accordance with the Holy Scriptures.

The Holy Spirit tells us in the word:

At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned and revealed them to little children.' (Matthew 11:25)

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:12-14)

For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:4-6)

“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)

Pascal’s Wager is widely used by Christians when engaged in apologetic argumentation with atheists. The logic is undeniable and might satisfy those who feel that they need a logic-based rationale before they will even entertain the existence of God. God’s word tells us that we must bring the faith. Christ brings the Grace. We are told that the kingdom of Heaven is for those such as children. Those who unconditionally buy in without mental reservation. Those who believe without hesitation or reluctance. Like that wonderful young man who asked me to pray with him.

Our Lord and Savior’s sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection are inconceivable to our frail human minds. The concept of eternal salvation through Christ is beyond the interpretation of our puny scientific thought processes. Not to mention our world is full of distractions from the enemy such as pornography, false religions, and various forms of wolves in sheep’s clothing. But nobody can deny faith. Strong faith. Mighty faith. When we believe it, we will see it. Faith is not about dipping our toe in the shallow end of the pool. Faith is about diving headfirst into the deep end. Choosing Christ as your Lord and Savior is not about, trying religion on for size and seeing if it is comfortable and pleasing. It is about accepting God’s call of obedience and walking with him. It is a declaration to God “I cannot do this on my own. I need you. You are the way the truth and the life. There is salvation in no one else! I unconditionally give myself to you. I am your disciple! I am your servant! I am your child? Put me to work Lord!”

During Christ’s time, despite his fulfilment of the prophecies, signs, and wonders, there were many who rejected Jesus. It is no different today. There are many who will pride themselves in their atheism and passionately defend it. We live in a time where many are too smart for their own good. A time of pessimism. A time of lax values and principles. And yet for those familiar with the book of Revelations, we know that none of this comes as a surprise. It is all part of the plan and all anticipated.

Blaise Pascal was making a secular argument as to why one should believe in God. By God he meant Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Blaise was a Christian living in a

place and time that was almost exclusively Christian. Since his day, some of our brightest scientists, mathematicians, physicists, and philosophers, have converted from atheism to being saved Christians.

Jim Wallace, former cold-case homicide detective, assistant professor of apologetics (Biola University), once vocal atheist:

“In the end, I came to the conclusion that the gospels were reliable eyewitness accounts that delivered accurate information about Jesus, including His crucifixion and Resurrection. But that created a problem for me. If Jesus really was who He said He was, then Jesus was God Himself. If Jesus truly did what the gospel eyewitnesses recorded, then Jesus is still God Himself. As someone who used to reject anything supernatural, I had to make a decision about my naturalistic presuppositions”

Frank Tippler, mathematical physicist, cosmologist, joint appointment in the Departments of Mathematics and Physics at Tulane University:

“When I began my career as a cosmologist some twenty years ago, I was a convinced atheist. I never in my wildest dreams imagined that one day I would be writing a book purporting to show that the central claims of Judeo-Christian theology are in fact true, that these claims are straightforward deductions of the laws of physics as we now understand them. I have been forced into these conclusions by the inexorable logic of my own special branch of physics”

Alister McGrath, theologian, scientist, Anglican priest:

“Atheism, I began to realize, rested on a less-than-satisfactory evidential basis. The arguments that had once seemed bold, decisive, and conclusive increasingly turned out to be circular, tentative, and uncertain.”

Lee Strobel, once a self-described militant atheist, former employee at the Chicago Tribune:

“It was the evidence from science and history that prompted me to abandon my atheism and become a Christian.”

Rick Oliver, member of American Federation of Herpetoculturalists, California Science Teachers Association, and New York Academy of Science:

“I remember how frustrated I became when, as a young atheist, I examined specimens under the microscope. I would often walk away and try to convince myself that I was not seeing examples of extraordinary design, but merely the product of some random, unexplained mutations.”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918 – 2008), Russian writer, winner of 1970 Nobel Prize in literature. Reveals life under the state atheism and communism of the Soviet Union:

“Over a half century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of old people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: “Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.” Since then I have spent well-nigh 50 years working on the history of our revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some 60 million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: “Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.”

Francis Collins, geneticist respected for discoveries of disease genes and leadership of the Human Genome Project. Director of the National Institutes of Health. Author of numerous books on science, medicine, and spirituality:

“I believe God did intend, in giving us intelligence, to give us the opportunity to investigate and appreciate the wonders of His creation. He is not threatened by our scientific adventures.” (19)

“The God of the Bible is also the God of the genome. He can be worshipped in the cathedral or in the laboratory. His creation is majestic, awesome, intricate and

beautiful – and it cannot be at war with itself. Only we imperfect humans can start such battles. And only we can end them.”

Richard Morgan, Mormon convert to atheism, and then to Christianity. Conversion due to participating in debates and online discussions, notably on Richard Dawkins’s official website:

“Science and philosophy do not have the answer to everything. If you are willing to listen with an open mind and an open heart and just say ‘perhaps I do not possess all the truth,’ that is an act of humility and I know that God never rejects or ignores acts of humility.”

Sarah Salviander, research scientist in astronomy and astrophysics at the University of Texas:

“In fact, it seems that every question we have about the universe is answerable. There is no reason it has to be this way, and it made me think of Einstein’s observation that the most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it’s comprehensible. I started to sense an underlying order to the universe. Without knowing it, I was awakening to what Psalm 19 tells us so clearly, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”

This is just a small sample of noteworthy intellectuals and academics who converted to Christianity. Let us rejoice in our salvation through Christ Jesus, let us pray for those who resist his Gospel, and let us evangelize and point them in the direction of Christ.

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